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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000998

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TAGS: [MARR](#) [NATO](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#) [KU](#)

SUBJECT: NATO'S ICI VISIT BRINGS MISUNDERSTANDINGS TO A HEAD

REF: A. 05 KUWAIT 4231

[1](#)B. 05 KUWAIT 4150

Classified By: DCM Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4. (a) and (b)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and Comment: NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) delegation to Kuwait briefed over a dozen NATO member country mission chiefs on its March 19 meetings with GOK officials. According to the head of the six-person delegation, Rear Admiral Dr. Deniz Kutluk of Turkey, the Kuwaitis had "unrealistic expectations of NATO" and the GOK was only prepared to sign a transit agreement with NATO but not a security agreement which would allow the GOK access to NATO's classified documents--a prerequisite for hosting Kuwaiti officials in NATO seminars. Kutluk went on to state that the GOK "needed to be educated" but that some misperceptions had "been rectified" and, in the end, the delegation felt the meetings had been fruitful. In a follow-up conversation with the office manager to the President of the National Security Bureau (NSB), Shaykh Thamer Ali Al-Sabah, Shaykh Thamer said that the GOK was "very happy" with the visit and meetings and looked forward to signing the security agreement after some "review."

[1](#)2. (C) The atmosphere in NATO's meeting with member country reps was one of surprise. Some chiefs of mission commented after the meeting that the NATO delegation was obviously not well briefed by the Italians and that a special brief should be offered to the delegation by the British Brigadier General who works as an advisor with the Ministry of Defense. One ambassador said he could not imagine "how they got it so wrong," commenting on the NATO delegation's belief that the GOK was not interested in consequence management while another diplomat expressed surprise that the delegation head, Turkish Navy Rear Admiral Kutluk, did not connect with the Kuwaitis on a cultural level--his briefing came across as rather patronizing. Regardless, the GOK seems to be taking the high road by stating that the visit was "excellent." End summary and comment.

Different Priorities

[1](#)3. (C) On March 19, NATO's ICI delegation gave a readout of its meetings with GOK officials to over a dozen NATO country mission chiefs and asked for guidance on how NATO should encourage the GOK to sign a security agreement. The security agreement would allow the GOK access to classified files of NATO's 26 countries and would ease the ability of GOK officials to participate in NATO seminars and workshops. According to RADM Kutluk, NSB's Shaykh Thamer nixed the possibility of signing the security agreement and instead

attempted to focus NATO's attention on the transit agreement which would allow for the movement of troops and materiel between Kuwait and Iraq; an item the GOK finally agreed to after almost a year. After some heated discussions, neither agreement was signed and Kutluk told the heads of mission that Kuwait could not come closer to NATO without being part of the security information network. "If they don't make a move (on signing), then we can't make a move," Kutluk added.

14. (C) In addition to the security agreement, Kutluk informed the group that Kuwait "did not know how NATO operated" and that "they had to be educated." He explained that even though the GOK had submitted a list of five areas of cooperation (out of 12) that they would like to focus on, the GOK failed to realize the submission would "have to be translated, disseminated to different offices, brought back to Kuwait, evaluated, and then discussed" before a decision could be made on what workshops would be most effective. He stressed that the GOK refused to go through the proper point-of-contact (referring to the Italian Embassy, NATO's representative mission in Kuwait) which caused "problems" but informed the group that NATO made sure that "they would stick with the POC now."

What Does The GOK Want?

15. (C) In concluding his brief, Kutluk asked the group to describe "Kuwait's aspirations" besides protecting its borders. Having met with officials from ministries of Defense and Interior, including the Chief of Staff, Kutluk said that he felt the Kuwaitis were not/not interested in consequence management, as defined by NATO, and GOK officials he met seemed to have little interest with regard to Iran's nuclear plant at Bushehr and the environmental threat it

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might pose. Several diplomats present cautioned that the image NATO was taking away of the GOK was inaccurate and that the level of GOK concerns could not be gauged by meetings with officials who might not be knowledgeable on that specific subject matter.

The Admiral Offline

16. (C) A reception at the Italian ambassador's residence following the brief afforded Poloff the opportunity to speak with Kutluk at length. The Admiral admitted that perhaps NATO did not have enough information on the GOK's concerns before coming on the trip and that his dismissive attitude towards Kuwait's border concerns were because "materially" they were more secure than their neighbors (i.e. fencing, berms, and police border posts). He was unaware of the Iraqi border protests at the northeast corner of the border and did not know of possible security concerns along the shared maritime areas between Iraq, Iran, and Kuwait. He confided that he felt border security was a "domestic issue" and not a NATO priority; even though it is listed as one of the 12 areas of possible cooperation. The Admiral went on to say that he was unaware Kuwait's rapid signing onto the ICI and subsequent repeat travel to Brussels was either unusual or expeditious. Discussing how NATO is perceived in the region, Kutluk offered that most of the GOK's misconceptions could be overcome and that the relationship would move forward; just not as quickly as he had hoped.

The GOK's View

17. (C) In Poloff's follow-on conversation with Shaykh Thamer, the office manager for NSB President Shaykh Sabah Al-Khalid, he downplayed the friction between NATO and the GOK and asserted that the meetings "gave a better understanding of how we can work with NATO." Continuing, he pointed out that "in a region with so many problems, for NATO

to come up with ICI was amazing." "The region," he stressed, "is not stable" and NATO's offerings are welcome. The misunderstandings have been cleared up and the GOK "now understands how to get tailored courses and seminars" from NATO although the security agreement still needs further discussion and review. (Note. The security agreement would have to be vetted by Ministries of Interior and Defense before being passed to the National Assembly (NA) for approval. Once passed, it is likely to take a year or more to be reviewed by the NA's Interior and Defense Committee, be listed on the agenda, and sent for a vote unless the Government presses for prompt consideration. End note.)

18. (C) Shaykh Thamer added that the NSB President was considering placing a military attache in Kuwait's embassy in Brussels as a means of improving the relationship. He also raised the possibility that one of NATO's 80 courses might be held in Kuwait since the NATO delegation told the GOK that the Command and Staff College was "up to NATO standards."

Saudi and ICI

19. (C) In response to a question about whether Saudi Arabia was serious about joining ICI, Thamer advised that Saudi would indeed join "but only after they see how things turn out" with other countries first. He claimed that the Saudis demonstrated their real interest by sending Prince Mohammed bin Turki, a senior MFA official, to Brussels to meet with NATO. According to Thamer, by sending such a high ranking official, the Saudis were signaling their intent to join. Finally, he admitted that "Saudi needs to be part of ICI for it to be effective."

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